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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 002494

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS, DRL, DS/IP/SCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2019

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [IN](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN POLITICAL THEATER: THE LIBERHAN REPORT
COMES TO PARLIAMENT

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2391
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2354
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2330
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 1813

Classified By: A/POLCOUNS Les Viguerie for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Parliamentary debate on the Liberhan Commission's report (Ref B) on the destruction of a mosque 17 years ago caused disruption and drama. Both houses of Parliament engaged in hearty mud slinging across party lines, while ignoring more pressing issues, such as the rising price of staple foods. While the Congress party hoped to gain short-term political advantage by leaking the report and then tabling it in this Parliament session, it was on the defensive during the parliamentary debate, weaving and ducking from opposition attacks over a report riddled with factual errors. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took this opportunity to reaffirm its Hindutva roots while taunting the government for a sloppy report. In the end, the parliamentary chaos failed to ripple across the Indian landscape; the average Indian seemed disinterested in the political showmanship and more preoccupied with matters of the pocket book. END SUMMARY

IN WITH A BANG...

[1](#)2. (SBU) The long-awaited report -- (17 years and USD 1.3 million in the making)-- investigates the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid, a mosque in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, by radical Hindu activists who claimed that Muslims had torn down a Hindu temple honoring the god Ram in the 16th century on the same site. The mosque's destruction set off a wave of violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims that killed an estimated 2,000 people and marked the worst communal violence since the 1947 partition of India. The Liberhan Commission, named for the former high court Judge M.S. Liberhan who headed the investigation, was established days after the mosque demolition. The Commission convened over 400 sittings and requested 48 extensions over nearly two

decades. The report has been anxiously awaited since June 2009, when Justice Liberhan submitted his findings to the GOI. It was leaked to the press prior to its official tabling in Parliament, creating a furor about "propriety and procedure" (Ref A).

...OUT WITH A WHIMPER.

13. (U) Debate on the Commission's findings came on the heels of the 17th anniversary of the mosque's destruction on December 6. Despite fears that the anniversary would be marred by mass protests and communal clashes, it turned out to be far quieter than observers had expected, with no disturbance at the disputed site in Uttar Pradesh and little tension elsewhere. Delhi saw small scale protests on December 6 with protestors burning copies of the report.

14. (SBU) The English language and vernacular media largely tuned out the anniversary and parliamentary mayhem, focusing instead on everything else, including India's recent cricket victories and the upcoming climate summit in Copenhagen. Saba Naqvi of Outlook magazine told PolOff that the public was cynical about the leak and ensuing parliamentary debate - "Most Indians don't care about Parliament's hoopla on this. To them, this is business as usual - a government ploy to avoid discussing substantive issues" like the ongoing rise of food prices (Ref B).

BJP: PLAYING TO THEIR HINDUTVA BASE

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15. (SBU) The Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) probably had the most to gain from the debate in Parliament. At the time of the mosque's destruction, the BJP was a small, right-of-center party that propagated Hindutva (political Hinduism). In what has been called a watershed event in recent Indian history, the destruction of the Babri mosque set the stage for the BJP to consolidate its electoral base and eventually come to power in Delhi in 1999.

16. (SBU) During the Liberhan debates in Parliament, some members of the BJP played to their Hindutva base, while others took turns pointing out factual errors in the Liberhan report. Outgoing BJP party President Rajnath Singh lead the charge against the report in the Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament). Taking a strong Hindutva tack, he exclaimed that the disputed site "was a temple, is a temple and will remain a temple!" Given the BJP's ongoing internal struggles and leadership crisis (Ref D), Singh's remarks will likely play well within the party's Hindutva base, which has been complaining about the party's steady drift away from Hindu nationalist orthodoxy in the last two national elections. The UPA also had to defend against charges that the BJP could not have pulled off a stunt as massive as the destruction of the Babri mosque without the tacit approval of Prime Minister Rao's Congress-led government in 1992.

BJP JAB

17. (U) Calling the report "an exercise in futility", senior BJP leader and leader of the opposition in the Rajya Sabha (upper house of Parliament) Arun Jaitley hammered the Congress party, pointing to the commission's flawed methodology and ambitious final recommendations - several of which are unconstitutional and have little to do with the Babri Masjid demolition. One recommendation advocated changing the structure of the bureaucracy, while another ironically suggested banning retired judges, such as the author himself, from presiding over commissions. Calling attention to several factual errors, Venkiah Naidu, senior BJP leader said the document "should be thrown in the Bay of Bengal".

CONGRESS COUNTERPUNCH

¶18. (U) Home Minister P.C. Chidambaram struck back at the opposition, elevating the debate to a clash between the "two ideas of India" and painting the BJP and its allies as anti-pluralist and anti-inclusive. Reminding the BJP of its successive electoral losses in 2004 and 2009 during a rare moment of applause from the treasury benches, Chidambaram said "Forget the Justice Liberhan Commission report, the people of India voted for our idea of India. Only our idea of India will prevail".

COMMENT: HEY, AAM AADMI! REMEMBER HINDUTVA?

¶19. (C) The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) missed an opportunity to hammer the UPA government on issues such as the price hike of food staples and corruption that resonate with the electorate. The current government's denial of former PM Rao's involvement and admission that they were helpless to save the mosque on December 6, 1992 sends a weak signal on competence. Although the BJP may have reassured its Hindutva base with its Liberhan debate performance, the electorate is increasingly frustrated with the BJP's inability to confront the Congress-led UPA government except on communal issues or relations with Pakistan.

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¶10. (C) Comment continued: For the Congress party, this is a missed opportunity to make good on campaign promises of clean governance and a strong stance against caste and communal violence. The Congress-led UPA government looks weak for putting out a report past its prime and replete with factual errors and unfocused recommendations. The Delhi rumor mill is in overdrive that the brow-beaten UPA government wants to truncate this parliamentary session before the December 23 deadline to avoid more confrontations. Meanwhile, the "aam aadmi" (common man) grows increasingly agitated about the skyrocketing food prices. END COMMENT
ROEMER